

January 12 Education Day



Lev Tolstoy

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"What can be more awful than country holidays?" Nothing expresses more clearly all the craziness and the ugliness of the folks' life as country celebrations. People live on weekdays, eat moderate healthy food, work hard, and communicate friendly. This continues for weeks, sometimes months, and suddenly that good life breaks for no apparent reason. One day everybody at once stop working and from the middle of the day begin to eat rare tasty meals, start drinking stocked in advance beer and vodka. Everybody drinks; the old folks force the young ones, and even children, to drink. All congratulate each other, kiss, hug, shout, sing songs, at times get moved by sentiments, other times show bravado, and yet other times get offended; everybody talks, nobody listens; voices are raised, quarrels start, sometimes fights. By the evening some of them are staggering, drop and fall asleep wherever, others are being led home by those who still have strengths left, and still others are lying around and writhe, filling the air with alcoholic reek.

The next day all these people wake up sick and, having somewhat recovered, again go back to work until the next such day.

What is this? Why is this? And this is a holiday. It's a church holiday: in one place it's Miraculous Appearance of the Virgin Mary, in another - Epiphany of the Holy Virgin, in the third one – the Lady of Kazan. What does the Epiphany or the Kazan mean - nobody knows. They only know one thing: it's a holiday - and they must celebrate. And they are waiting for the party, and after hard working life they are ecstatic to get to it.

Yes, this is one of the most dramatic expressions of the wildness of the working people. Wine and fun for them is such a temptation which they cannot resist. Once a holiday comes, almost every one of them is ready to stupefy himself to the degree of losing the human appearance.

Yes, these are savage people. But here comes the 12th of January, and newspapers print the following announcement: "A social dinner of the former students of the Imperial Moscow University will take place on the day of its

establishment, January 12, at 5pm, in the restaurant of the Bolshaya Moscow hotel, at the main entrance. Tickets 6 rubles for lunch are available" (next goes the list of places where one can get the tickets).

And this dinner is not the only one, there will be dozens more of those dinners, both in Moscow and in St. Petersburg, and in the provinces. January 12 is the day of the oldest Russian University, it is the day of the Russian education. The elite of education celebrates their holiday.

It would seem that people at the opposite levels of education, the savage men and the most educated people of Russia: crude men celebrating the Epiphany or Kazan, and educated people celebrating precisely the day of education, should be celebrating their holidays totally differently. Meanwhile, it turns out that the celebration of the most educated people do not differ by anything except for the outer form, from the celebration by the most wild people. Crude men join the celebration of the Epiphany or Kazan without any relation to the meaning of the holiday, to eat and drink; the educated ones use this day of St. Tatyana as an excuse to eat and drink without any relation to the St. Tatiana. Crude men eat striden-jelly and noodles, the educated ones — lobster, cheese, soups, filets, etc.; men drink vodka and beer, enlightened — different varieties of drinks: wine, vodka, liqueur, dry, and strong and light, and bitter and sweet, and white and red, and champagnes. Crude men's meal cost between 20 kopecks and 1 ruble; the meal of the enlightened ones costs between 6 and 20 rubles per person. Crude men talk about their love to their extended families and sing Russian songs; the enlightened talk about how they love alma mater and with entangled tongues sing nonsensical Latin songs. Men fall into the mud, the enlightened — on the velvet sofas. Men are being carried home by their wives and sons, but the enlightened — by the chuckling sober lackeys.

No, in fact, it's horrible, it's horrible! It's horrible that people, standing, in their opinion, at the highest level of human education, are not able to commemorate the day of education another way rather than, for the continued several hours, to eat, drink, smoke, and shout nonsense; it's appalling that the old people, mentors of the young people, promote poisoning them by alcohol, such poisoning, which, like the poisoning by mercury, never entirely passes

and leaves traces for lifetime (hundreds and hundreds of young people get deadly drunk for the first time and forever messed up and corrupted at this celebration of education day, encouraged by their teachers); but worse of all, people who do all of this, obscured their minds with their self-importance to such an extent that they can no longer discern good from bad, moral from immoral. These people have reassured themselves that the status they have is the status of teaching and education, and that education and training give them the right to yield to all their weaknesses — reassured themselves in this so much that they can no longer see the plank in their own eye. These people, indulging in what cannot be called otherwise rather than an ugly drunkenness, rejoice over themselves this ugliness and feel sorry for uneducated people.

Every mother suffers, I'm not even saying at the sight of her drunken son, but at mere a thought of this possibility, any master avoids a drunkard employee, every uncorrupt person is ashamed of himself that he was drunk. Everyone knows that drunkenness is bad. But here the educated, enlightened people get drunk and yet they are quite confident that there is nothing here is not only shameful and wrong, but that it is even cute, and with pleasure and laughter recall amusing episodes of their past drunkenness. It's gone so far that the most disgusting orgy, during which the old men influence the young ones to get drunk, orgy that repeats annually in the name of education and enlightenment, does not insult anyone, and does not prevent anybody, during drinking and after drinking, from rejoicing at their high-pitched feelings and thoughts, and from boldly judging and criticizing other people's morals and especially of those crude and ignorant people.

Every crude man considers himself guilty if he is drunk, and asks all for the forgiveness for his drunkenness. Despite the temporary fall, he has vivid consciousness of right and wrong. In our society, it starts to decline.

OK, well, you're used to do it and cannot fall behind; then go ahead if cannot resist; only know that 12nd, and 15th, and 17th of January and February, and of all the months it is shameful and disgusting, and, knowing this, surrender yourself to your vicious inclinations quietly, and not the way you now do it, - with solemnity, confusing and corrupting the youths, and, as you call it, your

younger confraternity. Do not confuse young people by preaching them that there are some other civil morality that is not based on abstinence, and that there is some other civil immorality that is not based on indulgence.

Everyone knows, and you know, that before any other civil virtues it's essential to abstain from vices, that any indulgence is bad, especially the indulgence in wine is the most dangerous because it kills the conscience. Everyone knows it, and therefore, before talking about any sublime feelings and objects, need to free oneself from low and wild vice of drunkenness, and to talk about high morals when being drunk. And so don't fool yourself and people, most importantly – do not fool the youths; young people feel, that, by participating in your wild customs, they do something not right and lose something very precious and irredeemable.

And you know it; you know that there is nothing better and more important than the purity of body and soul, which is lost with drunkenness; you know that all your rhetoric, with your eternal alma mater, does not touch yourselves not even when you're half-drunk, and you have nothing to give the youths in return to their innocence and purity that they lose by participating in your ugly orgies. So don't corrupt them and know that as it was for Noah, so it is for every peasant, and the same it is and will be for everyone — it is a shame not only to get so drunk to scream, swing, stand on tables and do all sorts of nonsenses, but it's a shame even without any need, in commemoration of the day of education, to eat delicacies and to stupefy yourself with alcohol. Do not corrupt youths, don't corrupt surrounding you servants by your example. After all, hundreds and hundreds of people who serve you, bring you wines and foods, carry you home, - all these people, and live people, who, just like for all of us, are puzzled by the most important questions of life: what is good, what is bad? Whose example to follow? After all, it's good that all these servants, doormen, carriers, Russian country people don't consider you what you yourself think of yourself and wish that others believed you — the representatives of education. Because if they were, they, by looking at you, would have been disappointed in any education and would despise it; but now, though they do not consider you being representatives of education, they still see in you learned gentlemen who know everything and who therefore can be and should be their role models. And what they, the

unfortunate, will learn from you?

You can ask yourself a question: what is more prominent: education, which is circulated among people via reading public lectures and museums, or that savagery that is maintained and distributed among people by spectacles of such celebrations like the celebration of the January 12th, celebrated by the most enlightened people of Russia? I think if all lectures and museums would have disappeared, and together with them such celebrations and dinners would stop, and cooks, maids, janitors, carriers would pass in their conversation to each other that all the enlightened people they serve never celebrate holidays by stuffing themselves and getting drunk, but know how to have fun and talk without wine, then education would have lost nothing. It is time to understand that enlightenment is spread not by some obscure and other paintings, not by printed or spoken word alone, but by the contagious example of the whole life of people, and education that is not based on moral life has never been and will never be enlightenment but will always be only darkness and corruption.